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SUBJECT: GREECE'S RULING PARTY FARES POORLY IN EURO ELECTIONS

¶1. (SBU) Greece tallied the highest voter abstention rate (47.4 percent) in the country's history in the June 7 election of Greece's Members of European Parliament (MEPs). New Democracy (ND), the incumbent party of Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, lived down to expectations that it would suffer from voter outrage over corruption scandals and problems in the economy. ND emerged bruised from the election with 32.29 percent of the vote, shedding almost 11 points in comparison to the last European election in ¶2004. The main opposition PASOK led ND by over 4 points, at 36.64 percent, but pollsters commented after the vote that PASOK's showing did not suggest strong enough momentum to ensure that PASOK could win enough votes in a Greek general election to form a single-party government. PASOK and ND garnered 8 MEP seats each, out of Greece's total of 22.

¶2. (SBU) Among smaller parliamentary parties, the nationalist, anti-illegal immigrant LAOS party won 7.15 percent of the vote, significantly higher than the approximately 4 percent it won both in 2004 and in the most recent general election in 2007. Pundits called LAOS the only "true winner" on June 7. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) won 8.35 percent of the vote, which was in line with past elections. The Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), widely identified with fringe ideologies and support of a violent anarchist movement, polled 4.70 percent, consistent with past elections but far below the 15-17 percent support predicted by polls as recently as last year. The Ecology-Green Party won 3.47 percent, a significant achievement for a party that had struggled to win 1 percent in previous elections. KKE and LAOS won 2 MEP seats each, while SYRIZA and the Eco-Greens won 1 each.

¶3. (SBU) Pollsters and media analysts highlighted the strong "protest nature" of the June 7 voting, with many Greeks either not voting or casting their ballots for tiny, unknown parties of all persuasions. The same reports emphasized that ND lost almost one in every two voters who supported it in 2007 (including those who abstained in this election) but PASOK did not win the support of these fleeing ND voters. Septel will provide more extensive analysis of these results.  
SPECKHARD